

VISITORS' MOTIVATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY AT THE MALAYSIAN MOTORCYCLE GRAND PRIX

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess visitors' perceptions of service quality at the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix championship and to determine their motives for attending the event. The sample comprised of 487 domestic and international tourists who were selected by means of convenience sampling technique. A quantitative survey in the form of a self-administered questionnaire was utilized to collect data. The results showed that the visitors' motivation for visiting the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix was to seek adventure and pleasure. The results also seemed to support that knowledge, sociability, relaxation, entertainment, and prestige were the motivating factors for tourists' participation in the event. The findings of the survey also revealed that the majority of respondents were satisfied with all the site features listed in the questionnaire, however, the improvement of the staff performance seems crucial as they are also perceived as not so helpful, lack of knowledge and not so approachable. Thus, this study portrayed important findings relating to the future planning of the event if it was to be a vital part of tourism promotion, as well as providing some insights that would help tourism managers and marketers to develop specific, tailor-made promotional strategies to target such market segment.

KEYWORDS: Visitor Motivation, Satisfaction, Service Quality, The Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix

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INTRODUCTION

Visitors' motivations and perceived service quality are vital elements in event management and marketing (Gronroos, 1984; Pearce, 2005). While different people participate in an event for various reasons and their perceptions of service quality provided by the event organizers may also differ. Therefore, understanding the visitors' motives and perceived service quality of an event is thus a primary goal of marketers in assisting the effective preparations of a marketing strategy. Generally, the events do actually have some particular significant effects or added values on the destination attraction for the tourism promotion programmes/activities. Events can provide a boost for spectator attendance. The events can persuade people to travel to a particular destination, can persuade people to stay longer, can persuade people to come at a particular time of the year, and can encourage people to return to the destination either to visit events or see more of the area (www.arts.monash.edu.au/ncas/teach/).

In conjunction with Visit Malaysia Year 2007 (VMY 2007), this study was commissioned by Tourism Malaysia to examine the effectiveness of the "Visit Malaysia Year 2007" campaign. One of the objectives of the study was to assess the effectiveness of core events as draw factors among visitors to Malaysia or as providers of added value to the visitors. Drawing from a larger study, this paper focuses on examining visitors' motivations and perceptions of service quality at the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix.

The Malaysian motorcycle Grand Prix is a motorcycling event that is part of the Grand Prix motorcycle racing season. The 2007 Malaysian motorcycle Grand Prix was the seventeenth round of the 2007 MotoGP championship. It was held on 19–21 October at the Sepang International Circuit (SIC), Sepang, Selangor. The SIC was opened on March 1999 with the objective to showcase the various racing events year-round in Malaysia. It took a record 14 months to create the track, 5.542-km-long with 15 turns and 8 straights allowing for speeds in excess of 300km/h. The track has a capacity of 130,000, with space for 32,000 spectators in the grandstand and 18 corporate suites. The major international Motorsports events were held currently include the Motorcycle Grand Prix, Formula 1 Championship and Japan GT Championship. However, the SIC was developed with not solely for F1 events in mind, but also several other local and international race meetings and events. Thus, the positioning of SIC as a hub of Motorsport activities in the region means the events appeal to a much broader audience locally and internationally (Ahmad Mustafa, 2002; McCartney, 2010).

Accordingly, knowledge gained from such behavioural research will eventually help the event marketers and managers to understand what motivate visitors to attend an event as well as to fulfill their needs and wants. Likewise, measuring visitor satisfaction on service quality is crucial in the event because satisfaction with the event is likely to influence event-related expenditure and/or repeat visitation (Putsis, 1998). As for event researchers, the development of a behavioral model or theory can organize knowledge and experience, stimulate and guide future research.

Objectives of the Study

The study is aimed to examine the visitors' motivations and perceptions of service quality at the Motor Grand Prix Formula One Malaysia. Specifically, the study was designed:

- To develop demographic profiles of visitors.
- To determine the motives of visitors attending the event.
- To assess visitors' perceptions of service quality at the event.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Event Visitor Motivation

The motives and expectations of the various stakeholders in an event differ from one another. Previous research has identified motives for participating events are varied and specific to individuals. For example, research conducted by Funk, Alexandria, and Ping (2009) found that motives attend the Beijing Olympic Games by Australians centered around having an interest in the event (to experience the atmosphere and the thrill or this once-in-a-lifetime event), learning Chinese culture (language, politics and music) and having a cultural experience (interacting with the local people and visiting historical and cultural sites). Likewise, a comparative analysis of the motivations of visitors at four South Island, New Zealand events - two food and beverage festivals, an air show, and a country and music festival by Nicholson and Pearce (2001) had highlighted the diversity in motives that were found from event to event. In addition, comparative studies revealed motives may vary by country, sport, and emotional attachment (Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008; Won & Kitamura, 2007).

Thus, a push-pull approach could be used in determining motives to travel to the destination and the event. Dann (1981) proposed two motivational stages in a travel decision, namely, push factors and pull factors. Push factors are internal to the individual and create the desire to travel. Pull factors are external to the individual and influence the actual

destination choice. Thus, the approach could be applied to motives to attend or not to attend a particular event. The two-dimensional model suggests that participants are pushed by their own psychological factors such as interacting with others (push) and the attractiveness of the event itself (pull). This in turn should form part of the message within the marketing and promotional campaign (McCartney, 2010).

Crompton (1979) further identified seven push motives and two pull factors. The push motives were escaping, relaxation, prestige, exploration and evaluation of self, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships and facilitation of social interaction. The pull factors were a novelty and education. Perhaps, according to McCartney (2010), push-pull motives to attend an event for push factors are related to the degree of relaxation, excitement, risk, escapes, social interaction, experience new things, novelty, and interest, and on the other hand, for pull factors such as the attractiveness of the event, other tourism products and services at the destination, destination image perceptions, and self-congruity. Thus, meeting these motives will lead to a higher degree of participant satisfaction (McCartney, 2010).

Visitors Perceived Service Quality

Visitors' satisfaction and perceived service quality of an event are closely related and crucial to the event marketer to design a marketing strategy. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) defined perceived service quality as consumer attitudes relating to the superiority of service. Similarly, Bitner and Hubbert (1994) suggested that service quality as "the consumer's overall impression of the inferiority/superiority of the organization and its services (P.77). However, a more traditional definition of service quality is the comparison of consumer expectations with actual service performance (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1988; Gronroos, 1984). As such, with the introduction of SERVQUAL, the scale has been widely used in various service industries (Yong & Pastore, 2004). The early research by Ralston and Crompton (1989) examined service quality within the context of the SERVQUAL dimensions: reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy and identified high and low-ranked items through a series of statements presented to visitors. Using these five dimensions, the SERVQUAL questionnaire (Parasuraman et al., 1988) measures the difference between visitor expectations and perceptions of an event. When the visitors' perceptions of their event experience match or exceed their expectations, a quality experience has been delivered, and the outcome is satisfied visitors who could decide to go to the event held next time. However, visitor satisfaction is related to perceived service quality, but it is experienced dependent. Satisfaction can be measured only among existing visitors to the event. As the event experience is heterogeneous, so not every customer will be satisfied all the time. In order to maintain a competitive position, the event marketer should aim to achieve more than a basic level of satisfaction (Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2008).

Meanwhile, due to the difficulty in understanding consumer expectations (with there being no clear set of expectations for each service setting), it is often argued that 'perceptions only' as a measure of satisfaction (one that excludes expectations) is more useful (Allen et al., 2008). For special events and festivals, various writers suggest consumer 'perceptions' are better indicators of the link between quality, visitor satisfaction and intentions to revisit (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Thrane, 2002). In addition, according to Lewis and Booms (1983), perceived service quality represents a more firm positive or negative attitude towards various services related attributes. Therefore, from the practitioners' point of view, the explication of perceived service quality construct might appeal for more research interest because it can be proven to be a useful management tool (Papadimitriou & Kostantinos, 2000). However, a research that adequately investigates both event 'performance' and 'process' should be considered in evaluating event marketing strategies. Cronin and Taylor (1992) acknowledge that the 22 SERVQUAL measurement items are appropriate but argue

that a model measuring perception of service quality results is more appropriate than the gap's model, which relies on a difference between expectation and experience.

In other related studies, from a sport event management perspective, the success of a sporting event depends on the degree to which it satisfied participants and spectators with quality service. Customers develop overall impressions about the service delivery system, service performance, and overall consumer experience (Getz, 2005; Graham, Neirotti, & Goldblatt, 2001; Kelly & Turley, 2001). When higher quality perceptions are developed, customers stay at the event destination longer, buy additional services, and recommend the organization and services to other consumers. Thus, service quality is obviously very important for the long-term profitability of any organization or event (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Indeed, the increasing interest in service quality has motivated many scholars to research the topic. However, in the context of event management, many visitor studies are conducted at events, but very few studies have been published regarding service quality (O'Neill, Getz & Carlsen, 1999).

METHODS

A quantitative approach by using a self-completion questionnaire of event visitors was carried out to collect data at the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix. The Event Visitors' Survey was designed to collect the information from the event, which was held from 19 October until 21 October 2007 at the Sepang International Circuit, Selangor.

Sample

A total of 487 respondents comprising of 281 domestic visitors and 198 international visitors who attended the event during the survey period were involved in this study. Using a convenience sampling technique, data were collected at the International Sepang Circuit through a self-administered questionnaire. A convenience sampling refers to the collection of information from members of the population who are conveniently available to provide it. It is the best way of getting some basic information quickly and efficiently (Sekaran, 2003). Thus, it is appropriate for this study to explore the effectiveness of the core event as lure factors among visitors to Malaysia.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was designed as a respondent-completed survey consisting of a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions, as well as an instrument to measure respondent motivations and perceptions of the service quality on several attributes of the event.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to respond to their travel behaviour and characteristics. Section two was designed to obtain information on the respondents' motives to attend the event. The respondents were asked to rate 15 travel motives to the event participation on a five-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, and 5 = agree strongly). The questionnaire items that related to motives for event participation was derived from Beerli and Martin (2004), and Fodness (1994). There were five factors in relation to event participation being utilized for this study, namely knowledge, sociability, relaxation, prestige, and entertainment. The psychometric properties of the scales have been tested and the results have demonstrated good internal consistency and construct reliability. The results showed that the alpha coefficients for all five dimensions ranged from 0.83 to 0.91, well above the minimum value of 0.6 as an indication of reliability (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

In the third section, the survey instrument took the form of a direct disconfirmation 28-item self-completion questionnaire which was derived from O'Neil, Getz, and Carlsen (1998). For each item, respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of service quality at the event on a five-point Likert scales, ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). Scale items were grouped according to whether they were "sites or staff related features" and represented many of the original SERVQUAL dimensions, including assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and the more tangible elements of the event experience. These items were identified within the literature as clear visitor determinants of service quality at the event and relate closely to the many points of encounter experienced by visitors at such event (Jackson & Schmader, 1990; Wicks & Fesenmaier, 1993; Getz, 2005). In this study, the core elements of service quality measured at the event were: access to the site, cleanliness, comfort, food and beverage, safety on site, seating, signage and directions, viewing of the event, helpful, knowledgeable, neat, and approachable/friendly/pleasant. A reliability test was performed on the scales and the alpha values for site and staff related features of the event are 0.92 and 0.96 respectively. Finally, section four of the questionnaire was designed to gather respondents' socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, occupational status, income level, marital status, ethnic group and residence.

Procedures

The event visitor survey was conducted from 19 October until 21 October 2007. A team of 10 survey assistants (enumerators) was trained to carry out data collection for this study. These enumerators were undergraduate and graduate students who were taking a tourism management degree at the Universiti Utara Malaysia. They were being trained in data collection procedures and ethical aspects pertaining to the on-site survey.

The enumerators approached event visitors randomly and asked them to participate in the survey. Respondents who agree to participate were asked to fill out the questionnaire and return it to the enumerators. The respondents were requested to complete immediately prior to departure from the actual venue. In total, 600 respondents agreed to participate in the survey and were given the questionnaire, but only 549 of the questionnaires were returned. Sixty-two questionnaires were rejected as they were incomplete. The final number of questionnaires used for data analysis was 487 which representing a valid response rate of approximately 67%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in table 1. The data obtained from the questionnaires indicate that 58.7% of the respondents were local Malaysians and 41.3% foreign visitors with 83.8% male and 16.2 % female. More than half (53.6%) of the respondents were married and 41.3% were single.

The majority of the respondents aged between 18 and 45 years old (81.1%) and more than 40% of the respondents have attained university education. Meanwhile, a total of 174 (35.7%) were professional, 13.3% government servants, 12.3% businessmen. In terms of their annual incomes, thirty-five percent of the respondents had an annual income of less than RM10, 000 per year, indicating that they represent the lower income group in society, or they may be students. However, about 24% of the respondents earned more than RM90, 000 and over may represent professional and business groups.

Table 1: Respondents Socio-Demographic Characteristics (N=487)

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex (N=487)		
Male	408	83.8
Female	79	16.2
Age (N=487)		
< 18	11	2.3
18-25	101	20.7
26-35	185	38.0
36-45	109	22.4
46-55	56	11.5
56-65	19	3.9
>65	6	1.2
Education (N=487)		
Primary School	10	2.1
Secondary School	107	22.0
Pre-university	63	12.9
College/Polytechnic	98	20.1
University	208	42.7
Others	1	0.2
Occupation (N=487)		
Student	37	7.6
Government Servant	65	13.3
Unemployed	12	2.5
Professional	174	35.7
Retiree	44	9.0
Businessman	60	12.3
Sales & Related	16	3.3
Administrative/Managerial	35	7.2
Homemaker	9	1.8
Others	35	7.2
Marital Status (N=487)		
Single	212	43.5
Married	261	53.6
Separated/Widowed	14	2.9
Resident (N=479)		
Malaysia	281	58.7
Overseas	198	41.3
Annual income (N=463)		
<RM10.000	162	35.0
RM10.000-29.999	76	16.4
RM30.000-49.999	51	11.0
RM50.000-69.999	41	8.9
RM70.000-89.999	23	5.0
>RM90.000	110	23.8

Visitors' Motivations

The results in Table 2 and 3 reveal the mean scores and standard deviations of perceived important of 15 event participation motives among visitors to the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix. The results seem to support that knowledge, sociability, relaxation, entertainment, and prestige were the motivating factors for the visitors attending the event. The highest motivating factor was to seek entertainment ($M = 3.95$), followed by relaxation ($M=3.77$), prestige ($M=3.75$), and knowledge ($M = 3.73$). Thus, in regard to the findings, it can be implied that entertainment and relaxation factors were

particularly important motives, especially for professionals and businessmen as they would likely to have some fun and enjoyment after their working hours as well as to refresh their mind and body by attending the event. Those situations are evidence of the motivational items examined indicated that among the most important motivation items for participating the event were to seek adventure and pleasure (M=4.12), followed by to have some entertainment (M = 4.04). All of these event participation motives mean scored were above 3 in a 5-point scale (with 5.0 being extremely important) indicating that these attributes were deemed fairly important to the visitors attending the event.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation for Motivational Items of Event Participation (N=487)

Motivation Item	N	Mean	SD
to know different culture or way of life of the people	481	3.57	1.16
to develop my knowledge	483	3.83	1.04
to know new and different places	479	3.88	1.05
to attend sport & recreation events	469	3.69	1.36
to rest and relaxation	482	3.78	1.14
to alleviate stress and tension	481	3.75	1.16
to escape from daily routine	483	3.78	1.26
to seek adventure and pleasure	487	4.12	1.04
to have some entertainment	485	4.04	1.02
to do exciting things	483	3.79	1.11
to go to places that friends have not visited	484	3.64	1.21
to tell friends about the experiences on vacation	483	3.83	1.14
to go to popular places	486	3.79	1.12
to mix with the local people	486	3.62	1.14
to meet/socialize with other people	485	3.63	1.17

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation for Motivational Factors of Event Participation (N=487)

Motivation Factor	N	Mean	SD
Knowledge	456	3.73	0.83
Sociability	484	3.62	1.06
Relaxation	474	3.77	0.98
Entertainment	481	3.98	0.88
Prestige	480	3.75	1.00

Perceptions of Service Quality

Site Related Features

The results of the visitors' overall perceptions of the site features were quite positive with the recorded mean score 3.82 out of 5 (Table 4). The overall percentage perceptions of respondents on site related features indicate that about 66.5% were satisfied, 26.3% rated as moderately satisfied, and 7.1% were dissatisfied. However, among the site features survey, about 20% were dissatisfied with food and beverage outlets, 14.1% were dissatisfied with the toilet/restroom provided, 11% were dissatisfied with accessibility to the site, 10.7% were dissatisfied with the parking availability, and about 10% were dissatisfied with the cleanliness of the surrounding. Therefore, based on the findings, a number of site-specific features clearly require attention, though, particularly those that are classed in the literature as basic satisfiers, such

as food and beverage, toilet, parking availability, cleanliness, and site accessibility. In short, those are features which are deemed basic yet essential by many in their overall assessment of events. Indeed, it is obvious that the majority of the site elements needs to be improved in the future organization.

Table 4: Analysis of Site Related Quality Perception Scores (N=487)

Site elements	N	Mean	Dissatisfied	Fair	Satisfied
Adequacy of parking	478	3.74	10.7%	29.5%	59.9%
Access to the site	484	3.74	11%	29%	59.5%
Cleanliness	487	3.75	9.7%	29%	61.4%
Food & beverage outlets	486	3.36	20.3%	32.1%	47.6%
Safety	481	3.73	9.5%	28.3%	62.2%
Seating	483	3.82	7.9%	28.8%	63.4%
Signs & Directions	484	3.78	8.7%	27.9%	63.4%
Toilet/Restroom	485	3.54	14.1%	33.2%	52.8%
Viewing of the event	485	3.76	7.2%	31.1%	61.7%
Personal comfort	486	3.88	6.6%	26.1%	67.3%
Overall satisfaction with site	487	3.82	7.1%	26.3%	66.5%

Staff Related Features

The results in Table 5 indicate that the overall ratings were quite good with a mean score of 3.68. It is clear that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the staff appearance, and their friendly manner and approachability. The results show that 62.5% of respondents were satisfied with the event's staff presentable and appearance and 60.5% were satisfied with their pleasant, friendly and approachable attitude. In other staff's elements of the event, the respondents also seem to perceive as more satisfied than dissatisfied. Thus, with regard to these issues, it can be explained in relation to the personnel who are involved in the events as qualified volunteers and enable to carry out their duty accordingly, and they definitely tried to perform their best for the good image of the workforce in the arena.

Table 5: Analysis of Staff Related Quality Perception Scores (N=487)

Staff Element	N	Mean	Dissatisfied	Fair	Satisfied
Helpful	484	3.58	12%	32.4%	55.6%
Knowledgeable	485	3.58	8.7%	37.7%	53.6%
Available	485	3.70	6.4%	34.2%	59.4%
Presentable/Appearance	486	3.77	6.2%	31.3%	62.5%
Approachable/friendly/pleasant	486	3.72	8.3%	31.3%	60.5%
Overall satisfaction with staff	484	3.68	8.1%	32.2%	59.7%

CONCLUSIONS

The event visitors' survey undertaken in the study reveals important findings relating to the future planning of the event if it was to be an important part of tourism promotion. The event can be a strong marketing and promotional tool, particularly for the organizer and marketer of the event. This study has helped in identifying the visitors' motives in participating in the event and their satisfaction on the service quality related to the event. Nevertheless, the survey findings cannot be generalized to represent all visitors to the event for the study due to the data collection conducted did not base on probability sampling design. As such, the results are subject to biases for those particular visitors attending the event. Furthermore, this study only collected data from event's visitors and did not investigate whether they were first-time or repeated visitors either local or international visitors. Therefore, it is recommended that an extended programme of

research could be conducted by considering the limitations of the study pertaining to sampling design and type of visitors. In spite of that, this study also suggests modification measurement scales to be used to obtain a qualitative data which may explain explicitly on visitors' motivations and satisfaction with quality service related to the event.

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